

Muddy Spots to Garden Plots

Dawn York

Ever wonder what to do with the muddy area under your gutters or that hard to mow low spot in your yard that ponds water when it rains? Why not turn those not-so-nice areas into beautiful, easy to maintain rain gardens.

A rain garden is a bowl shaped garden planted with native vegetation, designed to catch storm water from impervious surfaces (roof, driveway, sidewalk, etc.). Rain gardens reduce the amount of pollutants that reach our streams by temporarily holding and filtering sediment, oil, grease, and nutrients from storm water. Additionally, they do not require as much water or fertilizer as conventional lawns and they provide a habitat for birds and wildlife. Remember, the storm water on Fort Campbell is not treated before it dumps into the creeks/streams. These creeks/streams not only provide us with recreational areas but also recharge our drinking water supply. Therefore, any type of filtering device for storm water, such as rain gardens, benefits us.

So how do you make a rain garden? The first step would be to locate a downspout that directs storm water away from your house or a low spot where storm water collects in your yard. Be sure to keep your rain garden at least 15 feet from your house to prevent water damage. Make sure the downspout will direct and not dump water to your rain garden. There should be a grass buffer between the downspout and rain garden to prevent scouring of the edges of the rain garden and to prevent plants, mulch, etc. from washing out of your rain garden.

Next, lay out the boundary of the rain garden with a rope or hose. Dig the rain garden to 3-4 inches in depth across the entire site, making the bottom as level as possible. Add amendments (compost, topsoil, etc.) to the soil as needed for your area. If possible you should let your rain garden sit through a couple of rain events prior to planting. This will help distribute the amendments throughout the soil. Additionally, make sure the rain garden is not ponding water longer than 3 days. Excess storm/rain water should run over the garden edges. The storm water in the rain garden should be absorbed within 24 hours. If water ponds longer than 3 days you may need to add amendments to the soil and / or reshape the down slope side.

You are now ready to plant. Remember plants for your rain garden should be native selections that will withstand ponding water, moist soils and drought. These plants will encourage hummingbirds, butterflies and other nectar and berry feeders. You will also need to consider the amount of sunlight or shade the area receives. Typical plants for this area, Zone 6, include; swamp milkweed, columbine, asters, ironweed, lobelia, blue flag, blue bells, liatris, gentians, Joe-Pye Weed and Cardinal flower. Local nurseries that have qualified staff to help you select drought resistant species sell many of these native plants.

After planting it is very important to mulch your garden. Mulching controls weeds, moisture content, and protects plants.

The last step, and the best one, is to sit back and enjoy the beautiful rain garden you just created.

For more information regarding rain gardens please visit the following sites:

<http://www.appliedeco.com/Projects/Rain%20Garden.pdf>

<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden/gradens.pdf>

http://www.cbf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=edu_students_gettogether_raingarden